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RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #1525/01 3620910
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 280910Z DEC 09
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3006
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9584
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0971

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 001525

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/P, EAP/PD - THOMAS HAMM
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S.-TAIWAN RELATIONS

Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage from December 25 through December 28 on the aftermath of the fourth round of cross-Straits negotiations; on the legislative by-election scheduled for early January, 2010; and on the discussion in the Legislative Yuan regarding a possible legislation restricting U.S. beef imports. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed National Security Council Secretary-General Su Chi's remarks on Taiwan's foreign relations in a recent press conference. The article said it is the United States, not China, which is Taiwan's most important ally, so the Taiwan government should put more effort into improving its relations with the United States. A separate "Apple Daily" op-ed also called on the legislators not to save a little only to lose a lot on the U.S. beef issue. End summary.

A) "The United States Is What Really Matters"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] editorialized (12/26):

"In his first-ever press conference last Thursday, National Security Council Secretary-General Su Chi clearly stated the difficult situation that Taiwan is in: It is difficult being a small country sandwiched between three big powers. ... Judging from a realistic point of view, there is nothing wrong with Su's statement. In an era of globalization, there is basically no need to make things difficult for -- or to stand on the opposite side of -- any particular country. But why is it that it is everyone's feeling that the Ma administration is only seeking to improve ties with China while distancing itself from Japan and the United States? Perhaps it is because [Taiwan] has had a very poor relationship with China over the past decade and needs to beef up its efforts in making up for it now, thus resulting in [giving people] the impression that it is tilting toward China. But in reality, it is the United States, not China, which is most important for Taiwan. Hence the government needs to put more effort into improve its relations with the United States and let its people see what it has done, so that they will not be worried that the Ma administration is tilting toward China and selling out Taiwan."

B) "Never Try to Save a Little Only to Lose a Lot on the U.S. Beef Issue"

Professor Edward Chen from Tamkang University's Graduate Institute of American Studies opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] (12/26):

"National Security Council Secretary-General Su Chi recently addressed the Legislative Yuan (LY) and pointed out that if the LY amends the law related to U.S. beef imports and in so doing violates the Taiwan-U.S. protocol [on U.S. beef], there will be three possible consequences: First, it will have an impact on Taiwan-U.S. economic relations, and in particular, the Taiwan-U.S. 'Trade and Investment Framework Agreement' (TIFA) [talks] will continue to stall. Second, it will generate an impact on Taiwan's relations with the U.S. Congress. Third, if the move displeases the United

States, Washington will no longer strongly support Taiwan's participation in international organizations. ...

"Perhaps some people may question whether the long-stalled TIFA talks have done any damage to [Taiwan's] national interests. But what really matters is that the Obama administration has long since threatened that if both sides fail to resolve the U.S. beef issue, other issues such as double taxation, the investment pact, trade facilitation, intellectual property rights, energy and environmental protection, the visa-waiver program, and the extradition agreement will be put on hold as well. On the one hand, the Taiwan public, the small- and medium-sized businesses as well as the big companies in Taiwan will all suffer tremendous losses if Washington and Taipei postpone the talks on the afore-mentioned issues. In the meantime, President Ma Ying-jeou is concerned that should there be no progress in the talks on these issues, while both sides of the Strait have signed twelve agreements in 18 months, it will easily create an impression among people that the Ma administration is 'tilting toward China.' That is why President Ma called a press conference when he visited some Central American countries in June and urged the ruling and opposition parties in Taiwan to attach great importance to the U.S. beef issue. It was not difficult to see how much pressure he had endured then from the United States.

"Second, it is the U.S. congressmen from the agriculturally-oriented states that have been most supportive of Taiwan, and these congressmen are most concerned about whether the U.S. beef import question will be settled peacefully and smoothly. ... But if they learn that Taiwan's Legislative Yuan is to pass amendments concerning U.S. beef and thereby violate the Taiwan-U.S. beef protocol, their enthusiasm for supporting Taiwan will naturally drop henceforth. Given such an impact, they not only will not speak in favor of Taiwan in the Congress, but their support for the Taiwan Relations Act will also drop significantly. ...

"In fact, following one year of assessment, the [Taiwan] government has made sure that the U.S. side has comprehensively modified its feed for cows in the States. Therefore there is no longer any problem with mad cow disease, and with the series of administrative measures [employed in Taiwan], the government believes that the risks caused by U.S. beef are completely under control. Yet if our Legislative Yuan passes amendments concerning U.S. beef and violates the Taiwan-U.S. beef protocol, or if it demands a renegotiation [of the U.S. beef deal], other countries such as Japan and South Korea will naturally follow suit, which will certainly put the United States in a position too difficult to handle. Washington, as a result, will vent all its anger on Taiwan and will naturally have no mind to support Taiwan's participation in international organizations. Should that become the case, the legislators who support any amendments against U.S. beef imports will save a little only to lose a lot by putting their personal political interests ahead of national interests and national security."

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